

Victoria Courts Redevelopment

Introduction

The redevelopment of the a former Victoria Courts site, a 1940s, 36+ acre , post World War II era public housing complex, will inevitably change the complexion of the surrounding Lavaca Neighborhood. The potential for positive change in terms of increased neighborhood-scale services and improved infrastructure has a significant portion of the neighborhood's resident population optimistic about the future. The development effort is a public/private venture between private developers Lifshutz Companies of San Antonio/ Carleton Properties of Dallas and the San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA), who owns the former Victoria Courts property. A primary objective of the development team has been to utilize the Lavaca Neighborhood formal planning process as a mechanism for collecting public input and for generating dialogue between the neighborhood residents and the development team. As a result, a series of public meetings were held and development plan concepts were presented to residents to give them an opportunity to ask questions and make comments about specific aspects of the proposed development. The first of four public meetings was held on September 5, 2000 at which a general description of the redevelopment process was presented.



VICTORIA COURTS REDEVELOPMENT

Introduction (continued)

The Lavaca neighborhood residents, City of San Antonio Planning Department staff, and the development team agreed to have a series of additional meetings as part of the neighborhood planning “workgroup” process to increase the depth of public involvement. The three meetings took place on the following dates: November 21, November 28 and December 5, 2000.

The citizen workgroups began a dialogue with Alamo Architects, (a local design firm contracted to do a portion of the design for the project), to discuss proposed ideas relating to housing densities, street configuration, the amount and type of proposed new commercial development, as well as a variety of other proposed design elements. The design team presented examples of similar developments in other cities to generate discussion on several design related issues and to gauge interest in some of the proposed design elements. The residents and the development team have agreed to continue working together to create the best design solutions for the redevelopment effort and the neighborhood residents as the design process progresses.

Objectives

In their efforts to design a residential development that could set the standard for future mixed-used, mixed income/mixed density projects in the region, while also successfully integrating the development into the existing scale and character of the Lavaca Neighborhood, the development team made substantial strides to include public input into the project. While the focus of the project is set on to creating a model for mixed density / mixed income housing, both residents and the development team mutually agreed that increased pedestrian accessibility and improved traffic safety for the entire neighborhood are primary goals. Moreover, the potential “spill-over” benefits from the Victoria Courts redevelopment was cited as one way to initiate positive change for the whole neighborhood.

Site Plan Description

The plan calls for a mix of housing densities, ranging from one-story single family to moderate density townhouses to four-story multi-family rental structures. Originally, the development team proposed a defined division between the different housing densities. Single-family homeownership units are to be located in the southern end of the development, with densities increasing toward the



northernmost section of the development. The proposed development is to contain 850 total units. The development will include the creation of new streets, as well as address the functionality of existing streets at the perimeter of the site. Other features will include substantial green space, a small neighborhood commercial use element, and a concerted effort to preserve as many of the existing site trees and landscape elements currently found on the site.

Development Concepts

The development team presented a variety of conceptual ideas during through a visual preference exercise to help gauge preferences of various design options related to housing development, streets design, commercial development, park / open space, and pedestrian environment and linkages. The following commentary describes proposed development concepts that were discussed and issues that are still not addressed and/or remain unresolved:

Housing Development

- It is desired to develop primarily one-story single-family homes, with some two-story homes, along Leigh Street at the southern end of the site. Densities would gradually increase to three and four-stories apartment buildings that line Durango Blvd. Approximately twenty percent of the housing units are proposed as public housing. The housing types will be approximately distributed as follows: (See Conceptual Site Plan):
 - 675 units of high density apartments
 - 175 units of low density:
 - single family units with garage “granny flat” apartments,
 - duplexes,
 - townhouses, and
 - vacant lots
- Housing lots will have a variety of dimensions, tailored for the conditions of the housing type, housing density and street edge, etc.
- The developers agreed to explore the use of energy efficient materials as well as the use of HUD-encouraged PATH (Partnership for Advancing Technology in Housing) technologies to improve the quality, affordability, durability, energy efficiency and environmental performance of homes.
- To ensure long-term integrity of the neighborhood, the for-sale units will be sold with a combination of conditions, covenants, and restrictions in order to ensure compatible design,



- materials, maintenance and long-term use.
- The importance of maintaining a compatible scale of buildings on opposite sides of the site's internal and perimeter streets , as well as, streets adjacent to the rest of the neighborhood was stressed throughout the discussions.
- The development team and neighborhood agreed they would prefer not to have absolute separations between density and housing types.
- Single family homes will range in size from 1400 square feet one-story to 2600 square feet two-story houses, preferably with a front porch space.
- Single-family homes with garage apartments will also have some sort of alley access to garage apartments..
- Placement of structures on lots throughout the neighborhood may have a mix of perpendicular and angled approaches to the street, consistent with historic precedent.
- Unit Ownership:
 - SAHA will retain ownership of all of the rental units, which includes most of what lies to the north of Refugio Street.
 - Most units that lie south of Refugio Street will be sold to individual owners.
 - Some of the "for-sale units" will be subsidized to buy down construction costs and reduce mortgage costs.

High Density Housing Development along Durango Boulevard

- The new development will reflect the historical block sizes in the area.
- Durango Blvd. building massings are proposed to accommodate parking (hidden from view of the street) within the building footprint of mid-rise apartments and to reflect the historical block sizes in the area. Parking areas would not be visible from the street.
- Several examples of 12'-18' building setbacks were presented to residents to illustrate urban design options and building / street relationships.
- Concerns by Lavaca residents regarding the residential units on the ground floor facing Durango Blvd. will be addressed by one or a combination of the following:
 - Pedestrian friendly environments outside the building envelope will be incorporated into the development, while maintaining " private space" for the residents.
 - Claiming private space along Durango Blvd., such as porches, walls, level changes (apt. units elevated above grade with storage on lower levels or backside units). and backside storage. Primary residential unit entrances could face away from Durango Blvd.





- Possibility of constructing units, whereby the first level units are sunken half-way, while the second level units are accessed by a half level of stairs, therefore, no apartment unit entrances would occur at street level along Durango Blvd.
- Visual barriers (i.e., low walls) between Victoria Street and Durango Blvd. to define the neighborhood boundary of the neighborhood and “private space” associated with the apartment structures.
- Alternative ground level uses along Durango Blvd (i.e. : non-retail commercial spaces, and storage areas).
- Discourage front entry garages close to the street, especially along Durango Blvd.
- The architects on the development team pointed out that freestanding multi-story buildings appear larger than connected ones. Exaggerated porches, roofs, dormers, etc. only further accentuate this perception.
- Due to the many parking challenges of commercial development, Durango Blvd. is proposed to consist mostly of multi-story residential units. However, if deemed feasible, there is no objection to small, neighborhood-scale office space (travel agency, bank, etc.) uses that face Durango Blvd. provided there is limited as long as it does not have a negative impact (traffic, parking) on the neighborhood in terms of traffic and parking.
- Buildings with a height of 50'-60' and significant height variations between buildings may result in a “Disney-like” appearance. Therefore, buildings will be no taller than 4-four stories high with unified elements such as building heights, yet distinctive in design. The development team will identify techniques to unify the buildings designed by various architects.
- The development team stressed the importance of analyzing the proposed housing development characteristics for compatibility with future development patterns on the northern side Durango Blvd.

Street Design and Traffic Issues

- Proposed streets are to be narrow and pedestrian-oriented.
- The development team proposes to create a pedestrian-friendly environment by including qualities, such as:
 - Preserved green space between the sidewalk and the street, with trees and landscaping *within* the greenspace, rather than *between* the sidewalk and the buildings.
 - The concept of “public-owned” streets will be established.
- Attempt to retain the existence of long, narrow blocks to maintain historic neighborhood consistencies.

- Leigh and Callaghan Streets historically extended east across Labor Street, while Barrera Street did not. The proposed development will most likely not be able to accommodate the original alignment.
- Proposed block face lengths between approximately 340 and 670 feet.
- Changes in the alignment along Labor Street are proposed as a traffic-calming strategy, with a proposed re-opening of Labor St. to Durango Blvd..
- At the Labor/Camargo/Barrera Sts. traffic island, public art, fountain, etc. – representative of neighborhood character is proposed.
- The development team has concluded that the trees remaining from the old Victoria Courts were all planted in rows, and all about the same time. Streets will be aligned in a way that maximizes the preservation of the existing trees throughout the neighborhood.

Leigh Street (See Street Diagrams)

- Leigh Street will remain a two-way street and access to existing homes will be unaffected.
- An alley is proposed between Leigh and Barrera Streets. It will be a one-way, (12' right-of-way with ample shoulder space on either side) alley, targeted for garage access and garage apartment use by residents; garage apartments could front the northern side of the proposed alley.
- The proposal includes preserving the trees in this area.

Secondary Streets (See Street Diagrams)

- Although initially proposed at a 76' width building-to-building (20' building to curb, 36' pavement, -20' curb to building) [comparison: downtown San Antonio's Houston Street is slightly narrower], the development team has revised its plan to provide for narrower streets.
- Narrow street widths are desired in the new development to mirror the relatively narrow width of the current Lavaca and adjacent neighborhoods street pattern and other neighborhoods, such as King William.

Leigh Street (See Street Diagrams)

- Leigh Street will remain a two-way street and the existing homes will be unaffected.
- An alley is proposed between Leigh and Barrera Streets. The street just to the north of Leigh Street is currently proposed as a one-way, (12' right-of-way with ample shoulder space on either side) alley street, targeted for garage access use by residents; garage apart-

ments could front the northern side of the proposed alley.

Victoria Street (See Street Diagrams)

- Victoria St. could serve as one of several pedestrian access ways through the neighborhood. It has been suggested this street could serve as a linkage from the Lavaca Neighborhood to the east side of IH-37 or as a pedestrian-oriented greenway.
- Victoria St. could accommodate parking, slow-moving cars, pedestrians, and bicycles, all within the same right-of-way.

Intersection of Labor Street and Durango Boulevard

- A curb cut and median cut should be created to open Labor Street to Durango Blvd.
- An improved pedestrian crossing with a some sort of visual connection should accompany these improvements to allow neighborhood access to HemisFair Park and other amenities north of the Lavaca Neighborhood.

Parking

- Labor Street and any other access points to Durango Blvd. from the neighborhood should be barricaded during special events (at the Alamodome, HemisFair, La Villita, etc.) to prevent spectator parking in the neighborhood by spectators. Parking decal system information should be readily available to Lavaca residents and the general public. (*see Getting Around Town, Objective 1.6*).

Intersection of Labor, Camargo, and Barrera Streets

- This intersection, with a combination of residential and commercial uses, community space, and green space will be transformed into a major focal point for the new development, as well as the entire neighborhood.
- Labor Street should maintain its existing alignment with some angular changes in the path for traffic-calming purposes.
- Labor Street roughly follows the path of a former Spanish acequia. Residents suggested, and developers agreed that its presence there should be formally interpreted.

Open Space / Parks

- The neighborhood expressed a preference for a variety of park space sizes (pocket parks to

- larger green spaces) within the entire neighborhood, to accommodate a variety of gathering sizes and activities.
- Higher levels of residential densities could dictate the need allow for increased areas of green space.
 - The residential buildings on the eastern side of the development will overlook a long, narrow linear park.
 - Park space is intended to serve more as focal point for the entire neighborhood, rather than viewed as “leftover” space.

Park Space near IH-37 (See Conceptual Site Plan)

- Residents expressed a desire to have useable park space strategically located within the community, in contrast to open space designed as decoration.
- This park space is meant to serve as a viable public space for the whole community-a tool for uniting the area. Careful attention to the specific recreational uses offered must be given so as not to generate a volume of users that the neighborhood cannot support (i.e. limited parking space for users).
- Residents generally agreed with the developer concept, in which the recreational park should be on the eastern edge of the neighborhood near the interstate, while the more centrally located park should maintain the character of an urban park, similar to the King William Park.
- Park security: The constant flow of traffic along IH-37 would act as be a deterrent for crime, however; real crime prevention maybe dependent upon how the park is managed. The park space benefits far outweigh the potential costs and issues related to crime.
The park space will have a physical barrier along IH-37 to define a boundary; however, the park will be open to the public.
- While the neighborhood would like to have a free community pool as part of the redevelopment, the presence of an entrance-fee pool was also considered desirable. A public pool has been established as a very unlikely scenario, however, an entrance fee pool, incorporated into the apartment building structure(s), may develop as a possible option.

Commercial Development

- The neighborhood accepts the idea of some new commercial development on the northern end of Labor Street (Durango Blvd. to Camargo St.) at approximately 10,000 square feet. New commercial development along the other parts of Labor Street within the existing Lavaca Neighborhood is not desired and is explicitly stated. (*see Heart of the Neighborhood 1.1.4*)

- Along the small commercial corridor of Labor Street, it is desired to have wide sidewalks to allow for small café tables and chairs, etc.
- Residents confirmed desires about directing any new large-scale commercial development to occur on S. Presa St. or S. St. Mary's Streets with neighborhood connections through improved pedestrian-oriented streetscapes (*see Heart of the Neighborhood 1.1.5*).

Issues Not Addressed / Unresolved

- How much additional traffic will the new development generate?
- What kind of specific traffic-calming measures will the development have?
- What kind of "spill-over" effects, positive and negative, can be expected from the new development into the existing neighborhood?
- How can we protect the existing Lavaca Neighborhood from the economic market factors (i.e. gentrification) of the projected new development "success"?
- Who will be responsible for damage to infrastructure along the perimeter of the site that results from the new development construction of the new development?
- What other building elements can be incorporated into the development to help maintain a pedestrian friendly environment, specifically in the areas especially around the more massive higher density apartment buildings?

Time-frame

- Expected beginning of housing construction will commence in about one to one and one-half years or about 6 months after re-platting is completed. When will re-platting begin?
- Housing construction should be completed within another three to three-and-a-half years after it has begun. Is this a realistic timeframe for completion? How does the lack of Hope VI funding affect this overall timeframe?

Next Steps

- Form a working subcommittee to continue providing feedback throughout the multi-phased development.

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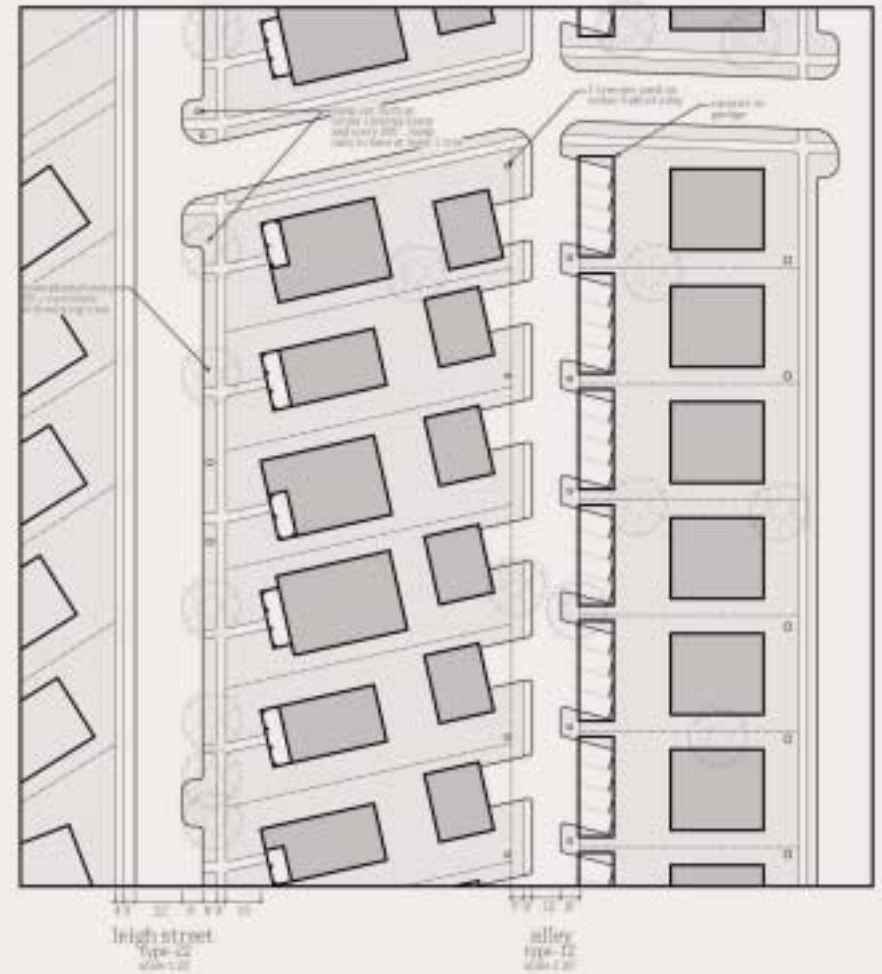
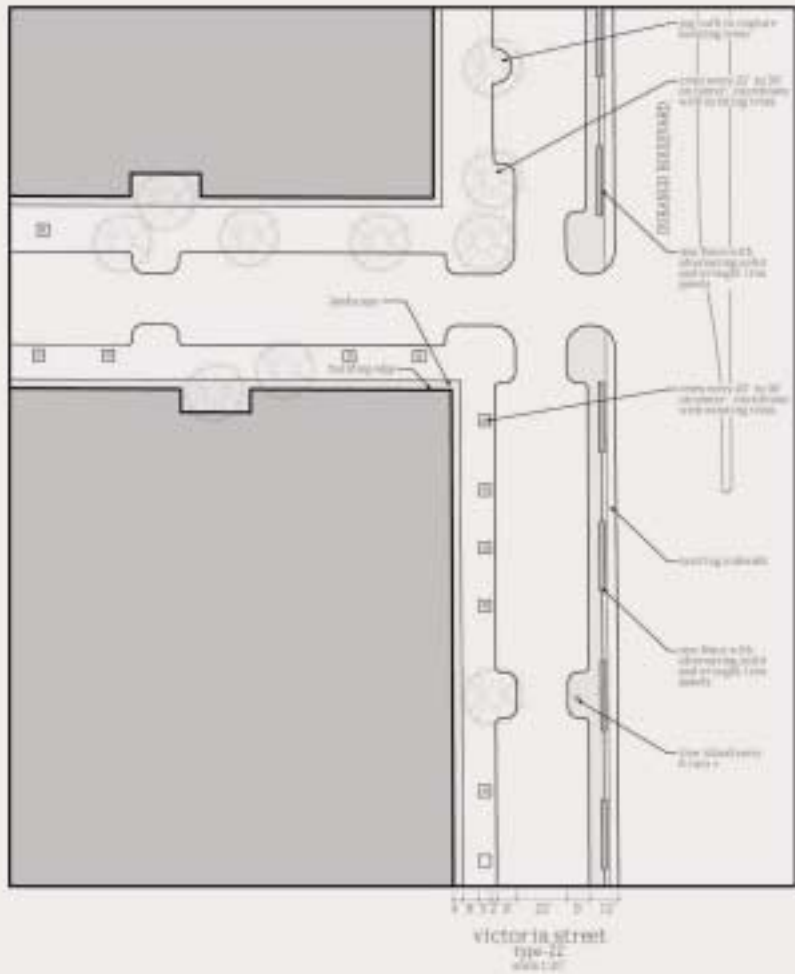
CONCEPTUAL SITE PLAN



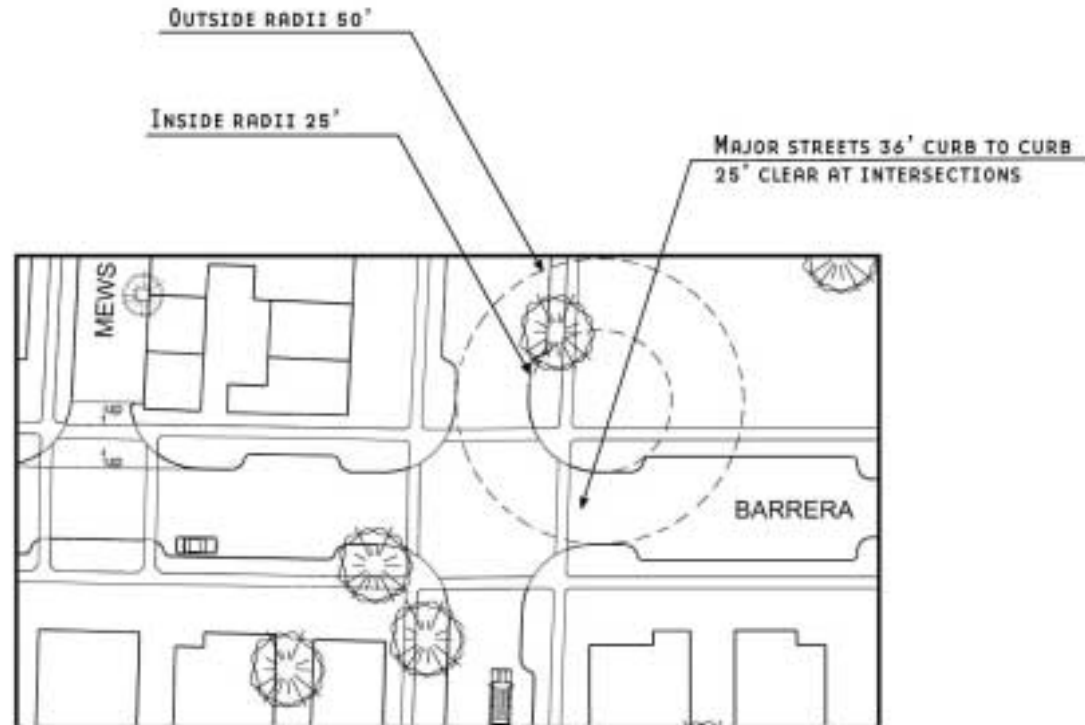
CONCEPTUAL SITE PLAN



STREET DIAGRAMS

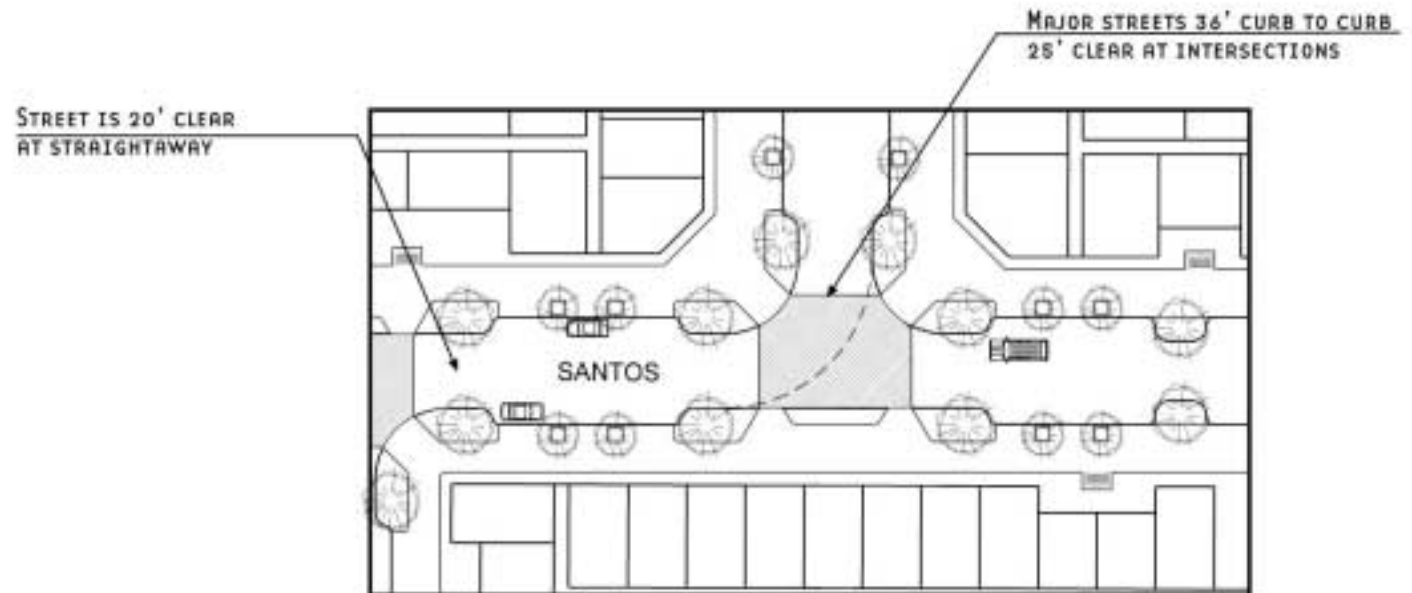


STREET DIAGRAMS



TYPICAL 3 & 4
WAY INTERSECTIONS
NOT TO SCALE

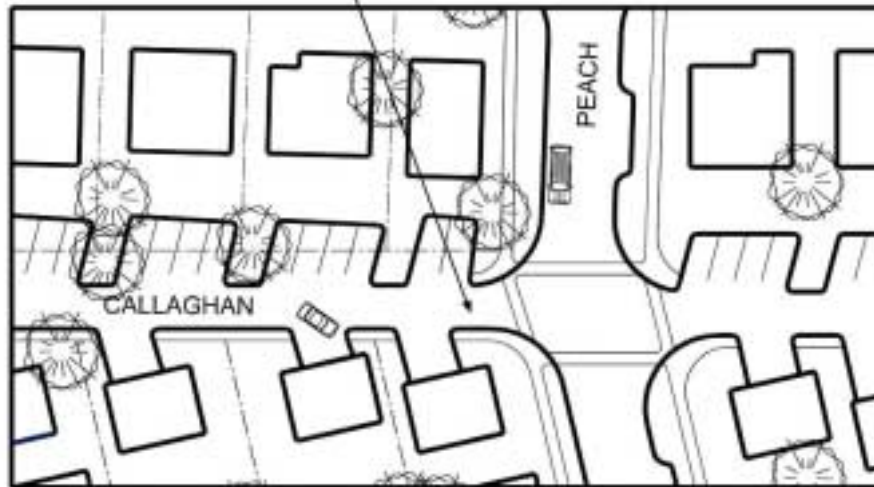
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STREET DIAGRAMS

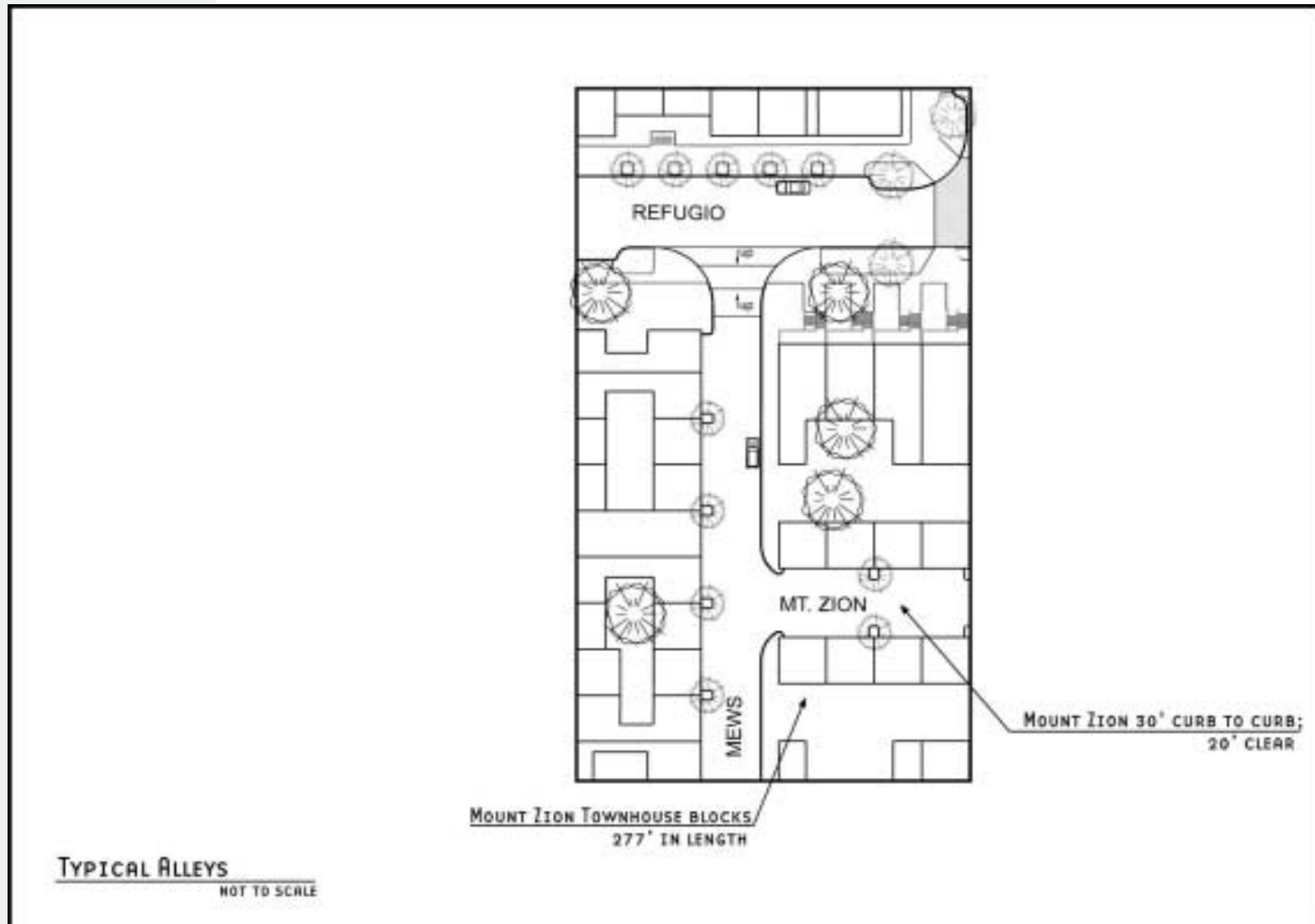
CALLAGHAN ALLEY (ONE WAY)
15' CLEAR, 25' INSIDE RADII



TYPICAL ALLEYS

NOT TO SCALE

STREET DIAGRAMS



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